

01/14/2006

Pre-Tech needs skilled workers

By LOHR McKINSTRY, Staff Writer

MINEVILLE -- New contracts that include work for French aircraft manufacturer Airbus could help Pre-Tech Precision Machining double its workforce in two years.

The company, based in the Moriah Business Park at Mineville, employs 32 people now in two shifts, but that could change significantly.

"The aerospace industry is really taking off," plant Manager Gary Cross said. "Airbus is a huge part of that. Over the next few years, we hope to double in size."

MODEST START

The firm, which manufactures small precision parts for the aerospace and medical equipment industries, started its Mineville facility in 1998 with 13 people, six milling machines and three lathes.

Today, it has 32 workers, eight machines and five lathes in 17,000 square feet of space.

People drive by the Business Park and have no idea what's happening inside, Essex County Industrial Development Agency Co-Director Jody Olcott said.

"Nobody knows they're here. This is a great example of how businesses can operate in the Adirondacks."

WORKERS NEEDED

But that same low-profile operation has hindered the company's efforts to find qualified workers.

"It's very difficult to find good machinists," Pre-Tech Human Resources Manager Jody Vona said. "We are continuously looking for skilled machinists and inspectors. We can train."

Champlain Valley Tech, across the street, has a training program for Pre-Tech that will be starting a new class soon, and the firm also has in-house training.

Pre-Tech Precision Machining, formerly Pre-Tech Plastics, also has a Vermont plant.

"These are good jobs that pay a decent wage," Moriah Town Supervisor Thomas Scozzafava said.

"This is a company whose employees enjoy working for them. I'm proud that they're in my town. This is proof you can have manufacturing industries in the Adirondack Park."

'TREATED ME WELL'

Moriah resident Joshua Proietti has been working for Pre-Tech since 2002 and was the firm's first student trainee from CV-TEC.

"I like it here," he said. "They've treated me well. I keep coming back."

Now a student at Canton College of Technology, he still works at Pre-Tech during summer break and holiday seasons.

Pre-Tech would like to find more employees like Proietti, Quality Control Manager Marcus Wright said.

"We're trying to find people to grow them into the business. We're hoping to bring them in to succeed."

Pre-Tech workers need good math and technology skills, he said.

"If someone has those skills, we can develop them into machinists."

The precision parts made at Pre-Tech routinely require tolerances of 10/1,000ths of an inch, he said.

"That's 30 times thinner than a piece of paper."

AIRBUS CONTRACT

The Airbus parts Pre-Tech is making are for systems in the plane's interior, Cross said. Based in Toulouse, France, Airbus manufactures 12 types of commercial jets, from 100 seats up to 555 seats.

"This is a skilled trade, very technical," Cross said.

"It's hard to get anybody in here. But we're getting the word out that we're hiring. It's a good company to work for."